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4/4/63

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BUSINESS - THE NEW ART PATRON OF CANADA

remarks by

C. E. Carson
Director, Imperial Oil Limited

Opening of the Imperial Oil Art Exhibit
at Sarnia Public Library

April 4, 1963

May I first say how pleased I am to be with you this evening, and how impressed I am with Sarnia's gallery facilities. I have been told by professional artists that this gallery is one of the finest in the country.

As you know, Imperial Oil has had an intimate association with art in Canada for many years. We are proud of this fact and proud that we are able to loan this exhibit to your gallery. It is an exchange exhibition. The Imperial Oil collection will be shown here during April and then in the London Art Gallery next month. During the two month period, paintings from the London gallery's permanent collection will be exhibited in the Imperial Oil building in Toronto.

It is a unique arrangement, perhaps a first in the business/art partnership which Imperial Oil has sought to pioneer in Canada.

Since the beginnings of civilization, the church, the state and the institutions of higher learning have been patrons of the arts; and so too, has business, whether it was Roman merchants commissioning copies of Greek masterpieces, or the Renaissance mercantile princes such as the Medici. In more recent times, however, the patterns of patronage have changed.

One change was brought about by the emergence of the mass democracies of the twentieth century. Millions of people -- ordinary taxpayers -- patronize the arts whether they know it or not. Millions of others -- shareholders in corporations, insurance policy investors -- do so as well. The ordinary

citizen contributes to art through support of his church. He also helps the arts through taxes which support institutions of learning including art schools.

Thus, we've seen a broadening of the base of patronage for the arts. Two other factors deserve mention: the phenomena we know as mass media; and the emergence of the affluent societies, not only here but in other countries of the world.

The rise of the affluent societies has produced a boom in art which was inconceivable only twenty years ago. Today we see a growing patronage of art by the younger citizens from all walks of life. The cynical among us might suggest that art in the affluent society has become the status-symbol substitute for the large car symbol of yesteryear. This, I believe, is as unfair as it is untrue. In this age of increasing automation, millions of

people are discovering that there is no substitute for the rapport between a living work of art and its spectator.

How is this burgeoning of art being financed in Canada? The first thing that comes to mind, of course, is the Canada Council. The Council, as you know, was set up by the federal government to foster the arts, letters and social sciences of Canada. There are the art galleries such as your own. And there are the individual citizen buyers.

The newest major patron of the arts is business. Millions of dollars are spent each year on the output of thousands of artists. I refer, of course, to the advertising industry. Commercial art is used by business to communicate with the public. The creative productivity of these thousands of artists is seen in the advertisements which fill hundreds of magazines.

It is seen in the novel and exciting packaging of products and in the changing shapes of such commonplace items as telephones and automobiles. This, too, is art.

But are we making a mistake in making the artist's work subservient to the practical ends of business? Should we continue to force the artist into the production lines of commercial art; force him to synchronize himself to the dogma of built-in obsolescence? The answer is, I submit, a qualified 'yes'.

My answer is qualified because our free enterprise economy is basically a selling economy. Selling means advertising and advertising will always require artists. Their work is important to our way of life.

But beyond that, business in Canada is reaching for and using art. There are companies like my own

that plan for a mural at the outset of a new office building project; insurance companies like Great West Life that commission family groups in bronze for the foyers of their new buildings. Another example is Ontario Hydro which commissioned the controversial Harold Town mural for the new St. Lawrence generating station at Cornwall.

It seems likely that the public -- and therefore the businessman -- will become more receptive and react even more favorably as the years go by. For this reason, I feel safe in predicting that even the broader aspects of the arts -- architecture, murals, interior design -- will be tied closer and closer to the activities of business.

When works of art are seen to help industry sell its products to the public, there will no longer be any doubt about the future of art patronage in our society. The final decision will rest with an enlightened business community, and an educated public.